This response will mainly concentrate on Marx’s approach to nationality and, as a necessary complement, also on his scientific method. Neil Davidson describes his own theoretical position as derived ‘not simply from sociologists like Gellner’ but from ‘an entire modernist tradition of which Marxism was part’. In this spirit, he makes frequent use of definitions drawn from writers in the Weberian school and it is largely from this source that Davidson takes his key assumption: that the nation is a capitalist phenomenon. We will start with scientific method.

**Weber and Marx: approaches and definitions**

It would be wrong to describe Max Weber’s methodology as simply positivistic. He defined his sociology as ‘that science which aims at the interpretative understanding of social behaviour in order to gain an understanding of its causes, its course and its effects. It will be called social behaviour only insofar as the person or persons involved engage in
some subjectively meaningful action’.¹ Weber laid particular stress on grasping subjective meaning in an empirically verifiable way: ‘rational proof can be supplied in the sphere of behaviour by a clear intellectual grasp of everything in its intended context of meaning’.² In this phrase, we find a recognition of the need to search out the complexity of meaning through a complete reconstruction of the subjective social context of behaviour. Such interpretative understanding was to be achieved in an almost dialectical way. It was to emerge by contrasting ‘actual conduct by a particular actor in a given historical context’ and the ‘conception of the “ideal type” of subjective meaning attributed to a hypothetical actor in a given type of conduct’.³ Echoes might almost be heard of Marx’s interplay of the abstract and the concrete. But, in fact, any such echoes are entirely illusory.

For Weber was not a Marxist and there remains a methodological gulf between his sociology and Marx’s method. Weber describes his conceptual endeavour thus: ‘to provide . . . terms with the necessary precision, sociology must design “pure” (“ideal”) types of corresponding forms of human behaviour which in each case involve the highest possible degree of logical integration because of their complete adequacy on the level of meaning’.⁴ These are tools, always sharp and precise – never to be blunted by confusion with actuality. Their scientific utility depends on their logical integration, their rational coherence as methodological instruments. Contrast this with Marx. Take his example of the ‘simplest economic category, e.g. exchange value’. This ‘presupposes population, population which produces under definite conditions, as well as a distinct type of family, or community or State etc. Exchange value cannot exist except as an abstract, one-sided relation of an already existing concrete living whole.’⁵ Abstract labour and the capitalist commodity, the basic elements of Marx’s analysis of capitalism, are the same. They emerge as a product of the historical development of capitalism. They take form, become actual, only at a particular moment as the consequence of the purposive actions of a class, actions that create the very special social conditions which make abstract labour and capitalist commodities possible. It is in the under-

¹ Weber 1962, p. 29.
³ Weber 1962, p. 29.
⁴ Weber 1962, p. 52.
⁵ Marx 1986, p. 38.